

CIADCI IAM 750719 Approved For Release 2000/09/14 : CIA-RDP86T00608R000200020010-8

Possible Implications of Egypt's Action on UNEF

19 Jul 75

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

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FINISHED
INTELLIGENCE
PROGRAM

19 July 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President
(National Security Affairs)

SUBJECT : Possible Implications of Egypt's Action
on UNEF

1. The attached memorandum examines the possibility that, in his announced refusal to extend the mandate of the UNEF, President Sadat is not bluffing and that he would permit the removal of the force if in the next week or so the Security Council fails to adopt an unambiguous resolution on Israeli withdrawal or if concrete progress is not made toward a second-stage disengagement agreement. What Egypt requires specifically in the way of Security Council action is still unclear.

2. It appears that Israel has not taken Sadat's action on UNEF very seriously; there has apparently been no Israeli mobilization and no official expression of concern, although the Israelis are watching Egyptian forces. We believe that Sadat intends that his action should be read as a signal that his patience with the pace of negotiations is nearing an end, and it is likely that a lack of progress will result in the removal of the UNEF, thus increasing the danger of armed clashes between Egyptian and Israeli forces.

3. President Sadat followed a diplomatic course of action in 1973 even as he was preparing for war, and it is possible that he is doing so now -- or will do so if he receives no satisfaction within the next few weeks. He has said frequently that he will take his case to the UN before going to war again, and he may consider that his current resort to the UN constitutes that last step. We recall that the October War came about two months after the Security Council debate in July 1973 -- Sadat's last serious effort at diplomacy before the war.

CLASSIFIED BY 368668
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SCHEDULE OF E. O. 11652, EXEMPTION CATEGORY:
§ 5B(1), (2), (3) or (4) (circle one or more)
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4. The Intelligence Community is keeping this situation under close review, by both its collection and its analytical elements. This memorandum has been reviewed by the Central Intelligence Agency, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, United States Army. There is general agreement except that the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes the memorandum is excessively pessimistic regarding the imminence of a Sadat decision to abandon the negotiating track or to order the withdrawal of UNEF.

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W. E. Colby

Attachment

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INTELLIGENCE ALERT MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Possible Implications of Egypt's Action on UNEF

The announcement this week of Egypt's refusal to extend the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) mandate in the Sinai Peninsula has thus far raised little stir. There have been no charges that Egypt is readying itself for war, despite the fact that its armed forces are on an increased state of alert.

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This memorandum examines the immediate implications of the Egyptian move--the possibility that the Egyptians are not bluffing, that they will order UNEF's removal if the UN Security Council does not within a week or so adopt a resolution of some substance, and that they recognize and perhaps intend that this removal will heighten the possibility of military clashes. The memorandum is meant not necessarily to predict, but to call attention to the dangers inherent in the Egyptian actions.

At the UN

Egyptian spokesmen have demanded, as the price for UNEF's continued presence, that the UN Security Council adopt a resolution on Israeli withdrawal that would "break the present stalemate" and constitute a "major step toward peace." What precisely this would entail has been left unclear. Egypt's UN ambassador has insisted on a "clear-cut, unambiguous" resolution imposing sanctions on Israel.

This memorandum was prepared by CIA and reviewed by appropriate analytical elements of INR, DIA, and NSA. INR believes the memorandum is excessively pessimistic regarding the imminence of a Sadat decision to abandon the negotiating track or to order the withdrawal of UNEF.

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In a more moderate vein, Egypt's second-ranking diplomat at the UN has said Cairo will seek a resolution that defines one of UNEF's duties as the supervision of Israeli withdrawals. Whether moderate or more hard lining, the resolution Egypt seeks would, at a minimum, be less ambiguous than past resolutions on the Arab-Israeli situation.

The Egyptians have been careful to avoid reference to the US in their focus on the UN; they have made it clear that they want the US to continue efforts to mediate an interim Sinai agreement. An Egyptian UN diplomat has specifically stated that Cairo wishes to avoid provoking a US veto. The Egyptians would almost certainly extend the UNEF mandate if an interim agreement could somehow be concluded or firm agreement reached on some major aspect of it before the mandate deadline on July 24. If no concrete progress is evident by that time, however, and the issue does in fact come before the Security Council as more than a pro forma mandate extension, the Egyptians may then use the debate as the acid test of the efficacy of US-managed negotiations. President Sadat will probably make some accommodation to avoid a US veto, but he may have reached the point of impatience at which he would be less willing to accommodate and would no longer shy away from putting the US on the spot.

Beyond the Security Council

It is quite possible that the UN debate could be drawn out beyond the mandate deadline in order to postpone any Egyptian decision finally to request the evacuation of the Sinai buffer zone. The decision -- if in fact the situation comes to this point -- could also be taken, however, by the July 24 deadline, and Egyptian and Israeli forces could be meeting head-on in at least small-scale clashes in the buffer zone by the end of the month. If the UNEF buffer is withdrawn, it is expected that the Israelis and Egyptians will patrol the vacated zone, raising the risk of clashes that could escalate into major hostilities. Both sides may well increase their force dispositions and mobilize reservists.

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In the event an extension resolution satisfactory to the Egyptians is negotiated within the next week or so, the danger of accidental clashes would of course largely be obviated. But successful maneuvering on this resolution would, in the absence of a further disengagement, only postpone the danger of military action. Sadat seriously intends that his action on UNEF should signal his impatience with the pace of negotiations, and any extension now is likely to be brief -- no more, perhaps, than a month. At that time, if he were still unsatisfied in negotiations, Sadat would be even more likely to follow through with an order to evacuate the UNEF zone; the danger of clashes, accidental or otherwise, would then be even greater.

A grave danger in the current situation lies in the possibility that Sadat will perceive that his action on UNEF is not being taken seriously by either the Israelis or the US and that he will run the risk of war, exploiting this lack of concern to mask his military preparations. Sadat is acutely conscious of the fact that because he did bluff, and failed to follow through, in the years before the 1973 war, he became a laughing stock of the Arab world and lost the attention of the superpowers. He is proud of the fact that with the war he surprised the world with his seriousness -- proved, as he puts it, that the Arabs were not a "dead corpse" -- and he is not likely again to risk a reputation for empty posturing. Sadat's action on UNEF is a gambit to gain attention and exert pressure for more rapid movement in negotiations, but he is not unaware that, if it is unsuccessful, he must either take further action or lose credibility and diplomatic leverage.

The Egyptians have lost no time in calling attention to the parallels between the situation now and that in the summer of 1973. At that time, Sadat took his final test of the US to the UN Security Council and, when the US vetoed a resolution condemning Israel, he set in motion his war machine while seeming to be concentrating only on diplomacy. Sadat is a two-track strategist; in 1973 he showed that he was working on a military track while simultaneously giving diplomacy a chance to work, and in the years of negotiations since the war, he has seriously prepared for the eventuality of hostilities.

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He is most likely to focus on the military option again when he perceives that his diplomatic efforts are not having effect and, equally important, that his political pressure is not being taken seriously. He would not signal his choice of a military over a diplomatic option, and he would not necessarily implement it immediately. The October war came more than two months after Sadat's final serious try at diplomacy through the Security Council debate in July 1973.

Sadat has said frequently that he would again take his case to the UN, if negotiations do not succeed, before going to war. If his Security Council effort fails, either next week or next month, he could decide that nothing more remains to be tried on the diplomatic track.

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